

# Preliminary results of a country-wide survey of staging Golden Plover, Lapwing and Curlew in The Netherlands

*Jan van der Winden, Gerrit Gerritsen & Marc van Roomen*

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*J. van der Winden, M.P. Lindostraat 2 bis, 3532 XE Utrecht, The Netherlands;*

*E-mail: Waardenburg. BV@inter.NL.net.*

*G.J. Gerritsen, Veerallee 33, 8019 AD Zwolle, The Netherlands.*

*M.W.J. van Roomen, Sovon Bird Census Work The Netherlands, Rijksstraatweg 178, 6573 DG Beek-Ubbergen, The Netherlands.*

## INTRODUCTION

Throughout the years, waders in The Netherlands have predominately been counted in intertidal areas such as the Wadden Sea or Delta region. Inland areas have never been surveyed frequently on a large scale. Between 1976-1979, national surveys of Golden Plovers *Pluvialis apricaria* were carried out in spring and autumn of each year (e.g. Van Eerden & Keij 1979) but, since the late seventies, no national surveys have been organised for inland waders. Since 1993, the Dutch Wader Study Group has made several attempts to carry out a complete autumn survey of Golden Plover, Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus* and Curlew *Numenius arquata* in inland regions of The Netherlands. Until 1996, for various reasons, all the counts were incomplete (see Gerritsen 1994, Van der Winden 1996). In 1996, a new national survey was organised in October and November for all three species mentioned. This time the Dutch Wader Study Group organised the count in close co-operation with SOVON and succeeded in almost complete coverage of all inland habitats of The Netherlands. The preliminary results of this survey are presented here.

## METHODS

A complete survey was conducted of all the 'inland' areas of the Netherlands, including grasslands, agricultural fields, inland freshwater marshes. High tide roosts and birds feeding on tidal flats were not counted but all birds feeding on grasslands or fields in coastal areas were counted because they are at least for some time dependent on inland areas. Counts took place in the periods 11 to 14 October and 15 to 18 November 1996. A full account of the survey methods will be given in a paper to be published in a future edition of the *Bulletin*.

## RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The total numbers of Golden Plover, Lapwing and Curlew counted in each count period are given in Table 1. It is clear that The Netherlands serve as an important stopover region for

all three species during autumn. The coverage was near complete and therefore these are thought to be accurate estimates of the total numbers present. Maximum estimates of 1,000,000 Lapwings, 225,000 Golden Plovers and 55,000 Curlews (inland only) are likely for the month with the highest numbers.

**Table 1.** Numbers of Golden Plover, Lapwing and Curlew in October and November 1996 in inland habitats in The Netherlands.

	<b>October</b>	<b>November</b>
Golden Plover	195,000	217,000
Lapwing	954,000	686,000
Curlew	46,000	50,000

Golden Plovers feed only in low proportions (of unknown quantity) on tidal areas in the period October-November. Except for the low numbers feeding on tidal areas all birds feeding on inland areas have been counted. Therefore the totals can be considered as totals for the Netherlands as a whole. Golden Plovers have decreased considerably in The Netherlands since the late seventies (Van Eerden & Keij 1979), when at least 400,000 birds were present. The reason for this decrease is not clear and is possibly the result of an increasing tendency to stay longer in Denmark (Rasmussen 1994). Comparable complete surveys in Denmark and Germany, carried out at the end of October 1993, counted 240,000 (Rasmussen 1994) and 175,000 (Flore *et al.* 1994, Rasmussen 1994) respectively. In Germany, the numbers decrease from October to November, while the Dutch numbers increase in this period, indicating a gradual southward shift. Therefore summarising the Dutch, Danish and German totals is difficult, but together these countries and The Netherlands may hold more than 600,000 Golden Plovers in October.

Lapwings spend very little time feeding on tidal areas so the counts can be considered to be grand totals for the Netherlands. This species has never been counted



countrywide in The Netherlands before. The number estimated in October 1996 is about 1,000,000 birds. In November 1996, the numbers were lower, probably due to a short night-frost period early that month causing birds to move south and west. During prolonged cold spells, almost all Lapwings leave The Netherlands. In late summer and autumn The Netherlands are an important stopover region for Lapwing on migration to wintering areas in Britain, Ireland and France. The wintering numbers in Britain and Ireland are estimated at more than 1,000,000 birds (Fuller 1986) and the total European population is estimated at more than two million birds (Rose & Scott 1994).

Inland counts of Curlews are difficult to interpret because birds from tidal areas roost or feed also on inland areas. As far as possible, tidal groups have been separated from real inland birds. This was not always possible. The inland numbers must therefore be considered with care. Numbers present in tidal areas in October-November are about 60,000 to 115,000 birds (e.g. Meltofte *et al.* 1994, Meininger *et al.* 1997). There is a considerable overlap between the birds counted during these surveys and the 1996 inland count. On the basis of the preliminary results it is not possible to decide what proportion of all Dutch Curlews is actually dependent on inland areas. The tidal and inland figures presented therefore cannot be summed to give a grand total for the Netherlands. However, the inland counts show that a large Curlew population is dependent on inland areas at least during part of their life cycles.

The results of the counts show that Dutch inland areas are clearly of major importance for Golden Plover, Lapwing and Curlew. A more detailed analysis of the data will be carried out to assess information about group sizes, feeding habitat and distribution. Moreover, it will be important to organise comparable counts simultaneously in neighbouring countries in the future.

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